DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 409 571 CS 215 911

AUTHOR Chambers, Paul
TITLE California Proposition 187: Pickets and Pedagogy.
PUB DATE Mar 97
NOTE 6p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (48th, Phoenix, AZ, March 12-15, 1997).
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Access to Education; Affirmative Action; *Educational Attitudes; *Educational Discrimination; Elementary Secondary Education; Ethnic Bias; Higher Education; *Immigration; *Political Attitudes; *Political Issues; Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS *Proposition 187 (California 1994)

ABSTRACT

The passage of California's Proposition 187 has mandated political and cultural debate in composition curriculum thus exploding the de-politicized composition classroom myth. As this anti-immigration initiative of 1994 applied to education, it most directly affected K-12, but it also represented a huge financial impact to higher education. It made undocumented immigrants ineligible for public social services, public health care, and public education at every level. Little of the heated pre-election rhetoric came from the academic community. Although the teachers' union donated $350,000 to combat 187, education's stance was not unified. The State Board of Education, for example, refused to endorse opposition. Proposition 187 passed with a 59% "yes" vote. Scores of academic senates, student groups, and professional organizations reacted with angry statements. The question is not whether 187 is right or wrong, but why there was an absence of pre-election debate. Where was the access to political discourse? Should not informed debate be a natural function of an educated society? This dialectic learning should be mirrored in a composition classroom. People should be taught that in a democracy they can have access to critical political inquiry through communication. (CR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 409 571

California Proposition 187: Pickets and Pedagogy.

Paul Chambers Sonoma State University chamberp@sonoma.edu

I know I am supposed to start with a joke, but the anonymous quotation that I will start with may not strike all of you as funny.

"So laugh and jump for joy my friends. Or weep my friends with sorrow. What California is today, the rest will be tomorrow." -Anonymous-

The myth of the de-politicized composition classroom has been exploded. The passage of California's Proposition 187 has radicalized the freshmen in my classroom, and the presence of affirmative action hunger-strikers with names like Hinojosa, Gonzalez, and Tou mandate political and cultural debate in composition curriculum. Reaction to California's Prop 187, the anti-immigration initiative of 1994, has created sophisticated young men and women with political identities. But reaction can never equal pro-action. Where was the informed debate ***before*** 187 passed? Where was the political public forum? Does it belong in education? Should it be in public universities? Maxine Hairston, in her May 1992 3Cs article, said no. But it can be seen from her May '93 3Cs reply to critics, that her article was based more on nostalgia than pedagogy. She writes, "my first professional article, published more than 20 years ago, was titled "What's a Freshmen Theme for?" It seems appropriate that "Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing," which will certainly be my last major professional article, focuses in the same topic." As William Thelin points out in his '93 3Cs response to Hairston she, "adds nothing worthwhile to the argument, and as a field, we've moved." In California, one agent of this move was Proposition 187.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
P Chambers
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

As it applied to education, 187 most directly impacted K through 12. But 187 also represented a huge financial impact to higher education. The initiative made undocumented immigrants ineligible for public social services, public health care, and public education at every level. The initiative required state and local agencies to report suspected illegal aliens to the California Attorney General and the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, the INS. In

CS215911

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

effect, 187 made every teacher, professor, administrator and support personnel an agent of the INS. Meanwhile, the administrative costs of 187 were estimated by the office of legislative analysis to exceed $100 million in the first year. Particularly important to higher education, 187 represented the loss of more than 12 billion dollars in federal aid because the statute violated federal privacy laws.

However, even more damaging than the money, was the fear and suspicion the law's wording engendered: "Any suspected illegals must be reported." The state's Latino and Asian populations rightly concluded that this suspicion would lead to intolerance and pressure on their populations at school and in other public facilities. As it turned out, numerous attacks occurred as a result of the election's heated rhetoric, most of the attacks on ***citizens*** of color.

But little of the heated pre-election rhetoric came from the academic community. Some in the education community including the NEA, the PTA, the California Teacher's union, and minority legal defense and educational groups, came out against 187. However, the muted nature of the pre-election response was typified by the actions of the teachers union, one of the largest, most influential, and arguably, most liberal organizations in the state. The union had, in 1993, spent millions of dollars to defeat a school vouchers initiative. To combat 187, the union donated $350,000 to "Taxpayers Against 187" a campaign organization whose message was not crystal clear. The PR firm hired by "Taxpayers" to orchestrate the "No on 187" vote chose themes hard for minority and progressive groups to support. The firm's campaign conceded the troublesome nature of illegal immigrants and immigration--but blamed the federal border control policy. A second set of messages played on voters' fears: rampaging gangs of [brown] children pushed out of the schools; the spread of tuberculosis by untreated 'illegals'; and, the staple of anti-initiative campaigns, that 187 would lead to bureaucracy and cost too much. This message was intolerable to minority groups who rightly resented the backhanded support it represented. Consequently, the message of 187's opposition was garbled.

Education's stance as a community was not unified. The State Board of Education refused to endorse a position opposing Proposition 187. Other educators were quoted in the media as supportive of 187. Meanwhile grassroots organizations of teachers, like the Los Angeles based On Campus, circumvented the regulations prohibiting political activity at schools by passing out pledge forms in lunch bags -- democratic action and political activity were considered subversive. It fell to students of color and other minority organizations to express moral outrage about 187. Yet media images of the 187 opposition marching under Mexican flags did not play well to the electorate. Obviously the student community was politicized. However, there was no consensus and there seemed to be no real concern outside of minority and immigrant communities. Elaine Sundberg, an administrator at Sonoma State University who became very active in the post election anti-187 activities told me, "We liberals were taken by surprise in the elections of 1994. We never thought 187 would pass. It was kind of a wake-up call."

Proposition 187 passed with a 59% yes vote. It passed in virtually every county in the state. Exit polls showed union members and voters with at least some college education voted for 187; undoubtedly this included many educators. Isn't this an odd result considering Hairston's imagined masses of radical-leftist-composition teachers? The survivors of a radically politicized composition class should have been counted on to oppose 187.

Injunctions were sought immediately after the election and on November 20, 1995, a federal judge ruled most of 187 unconstitutional. But 187's divisive damage had been done and the reaction was building fast. Large gatherings of Latino and other professionals, politicians and academics met to examine their societal roles in light of 187. Scores of Academic Senates, student groups, and professional organizations reacted with angry statements to the passage of 187. Where will future members of these groups learn to identify audience appropriate communications and write pointed, yet civil, language? Where will citizens learn how to participate in these discourses? "Just Writing"--mere expression-- cannot contextualize real communication discrepancies, real

cultural differences. What about writing for justice? In his article, "The Politics of Composition Instruction," in the fall '96 NEA Higher Education Journal, J Paul Johnson writes, "It is probably neither possible nor advisable to 'depoliticize' composition. The appropriate response to accusations of indoctrination is simply to politicize responsibly." Johnson points to the "Statement of principles" of the American Federation of Teachers that calls for inclusion of democratic values in the classroom. These values include, "Devotion to human dignity and freedom, equal rights, diversity, the rule of law, personal and civic responsibility, and social and economic justice." Are these concepts radical leftist ideas?

However, my question is not whether 187 was right or wrong--good or bad--but where was the pre-election debate? Where was the access to political discourse? In the flood of angry reaction to 187's passage, the late Mario Savio, formed with others the Campus Coalitions for Human Rights and Social Justice shortly after the election. Jeff Lustig of Cal State Sacramento and Dick Walker of Cal Berkeley wrote a passionate pamphlet for the Coalitions, "No Way Out: Immigrants and the New California." They outline California's long anti-immigrant invective and juxtapose it against the contributions of immigrant communities to the health and wealth of the state. While on the web, "No way out" was never widely published due to the response it received within the Coalitions where it prompted, "No Way in: A Reply to J. Lustig and D. Walker's, No Way Out." This article by Kwasi Harris of San Jose State, and Robert C. Smith of San Francisco State, assailed "No Way Out" as "fundamentally flawed" for not addressing the "negative impact of undocumented workers on low-skilled African Americans and other low wage workers." An intense political/cultural dialogue formed around the differences in perception. Why shouldn't this dialectic learning be mirrored in a composition classroom? It should be noted that these are not Hairston's liberal "deconstructionists ....from the lower floors of English departments." Walker is a professor of Geography, Savio was a Mathematician and a trained physicist, Harris is an African-American Studies expert. But where will non-experts learn to discuss trans-cultural topics? Shouldn't informed debate be a natural function of an educated society?

"Just Teaching"--mere teaching-- may not address citizenship/political or civics discourse genres such as those represented by 187. What about teaching justice? If you give people a vote you have an electorate. Teach people access to critical political inquiry through communication and you have a democracy. Access to the tools of political/cultural discourse is an appropriate curriculum for composition classrooms. Activism is natural in a democracy.

Maxine Hairston's ideas of composition recall a culturally simpler time. And to be sure, the Cold War era limited political choices and activities. But as the activities of the students, administrators, and faculty following California's proposition 187 demonstrate, education has become politicized. What are we as composition theorists and instructors going to do about it? Johnson and other advocates of responsible cultural debate point the way.

(I will stop here if I run over time)

I want to leave you with the closing remarks of Johnson's article, "That there is yet little agreement on what the politics of composition should be does not argue against politicization itself. Rather it seems to me an argument for a better, more scrupulous discussion of such courses, one more finely attuned to issues of academic freedom and responsibility than the debates the profession has had, at times, the ill-fortune to witness thus far."